MARVEL
032
AARON
LARROCA
DELGADO
STAR WARS
STAR WARS
SCREAMING CITADEL
PART 4 OF 5

THE SCREAMING CITADEL

Part IV

It is a time of turmoil in the galaxy. While the evil Galactic Empire remains strong, the forces of the Rebel Alliance fight for freedom from their oppressive grasp, establishing a secret outpost deep in the Outer Rim.

Young rebel pilot Luke Skywalker, struggling to find his destiny, accepts an offer to accompany rogue archaeologist Aphra to the Citadel of Ktath'atn—the Screaming Citadel—in an effort to impress the Queen, who will be able to activate an artifact with the consciousness of an ancient Jedi inside.

Luke and Aphra discover that the Queen intends to capture them when rebels Princess Leia, Han Solo, and Sana Starros arrive to coordinate an escape. While Luke and Han quickly fall under the Queen's mesmerizing stare, the others prepare to battle their way out....

JASON AARON
Writer

SALVADOR LARROCA
Artist

EDGAR DELGADO
Colorist

VC's CLAYTON COWLES
Letterer

MARCO CHECCHETTO
Cover

HEATHER ANTOS
Assistant Editor

JORDAN D. WHITE
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Lucasfilm Story Group JAMES WAUGH, LELAND CHEE, MATT MARTIN

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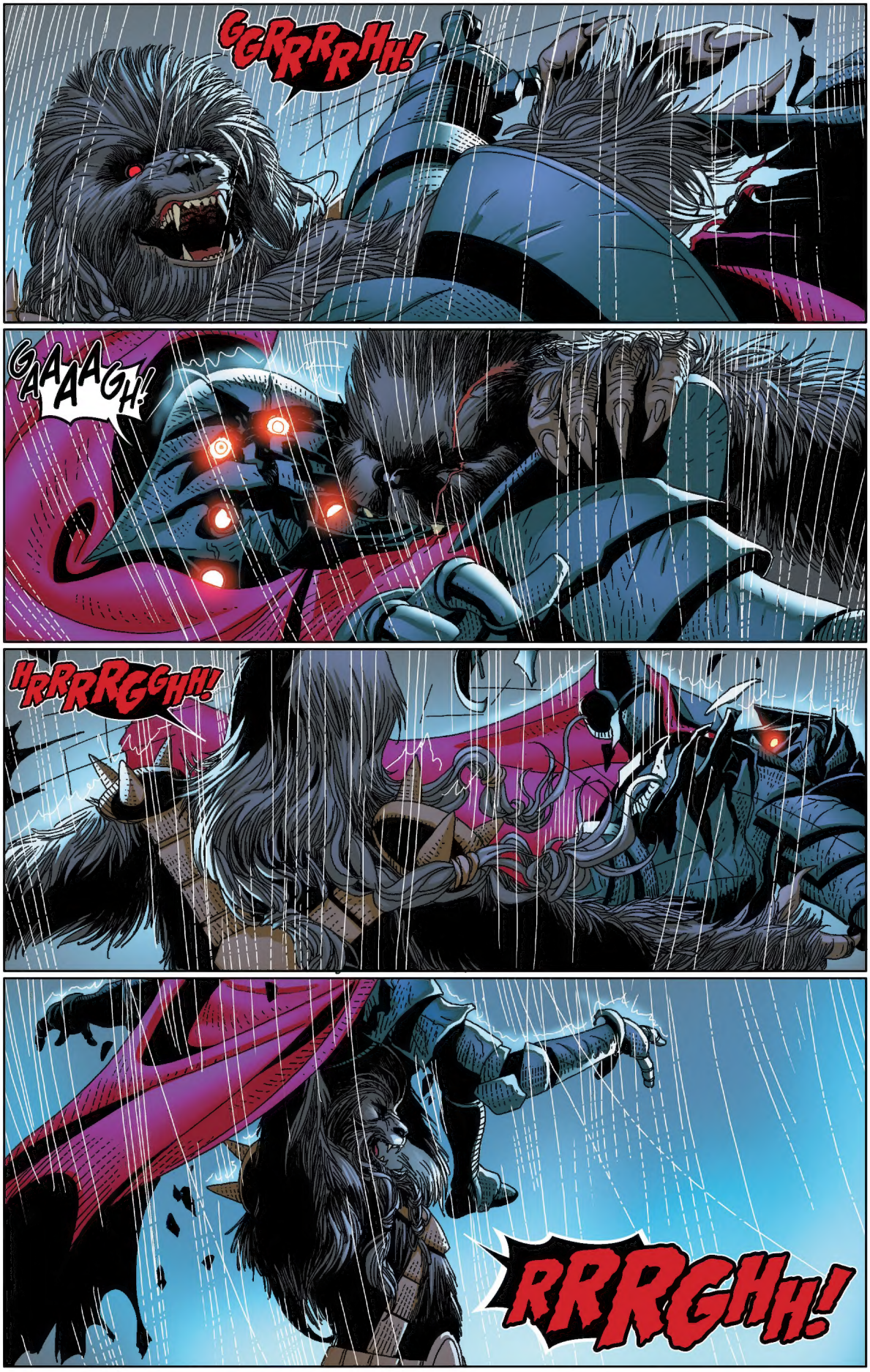
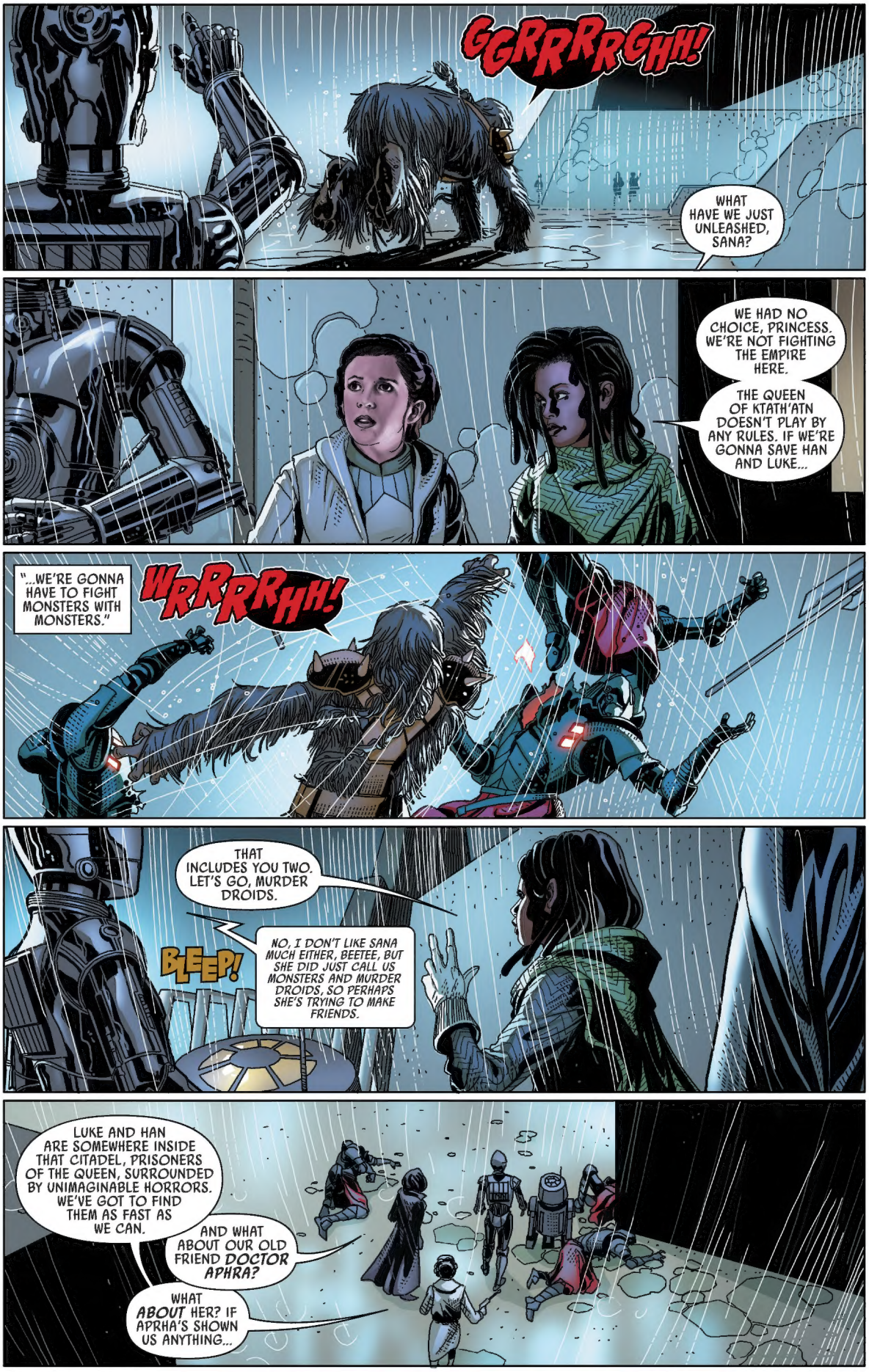
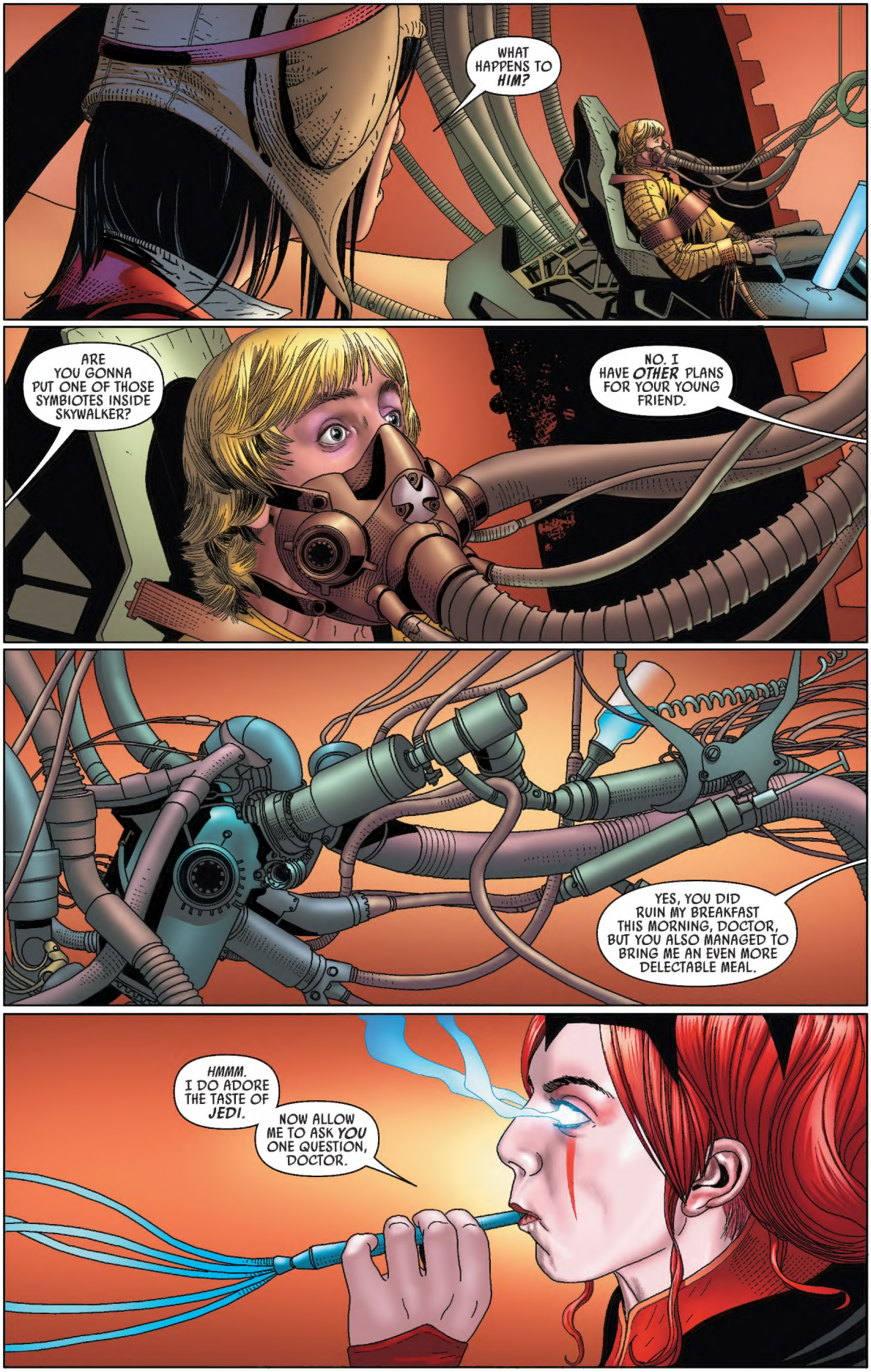

GGRRRRHH!
GAAAAGH!
HRRRRGGHH!
RRRGHH!

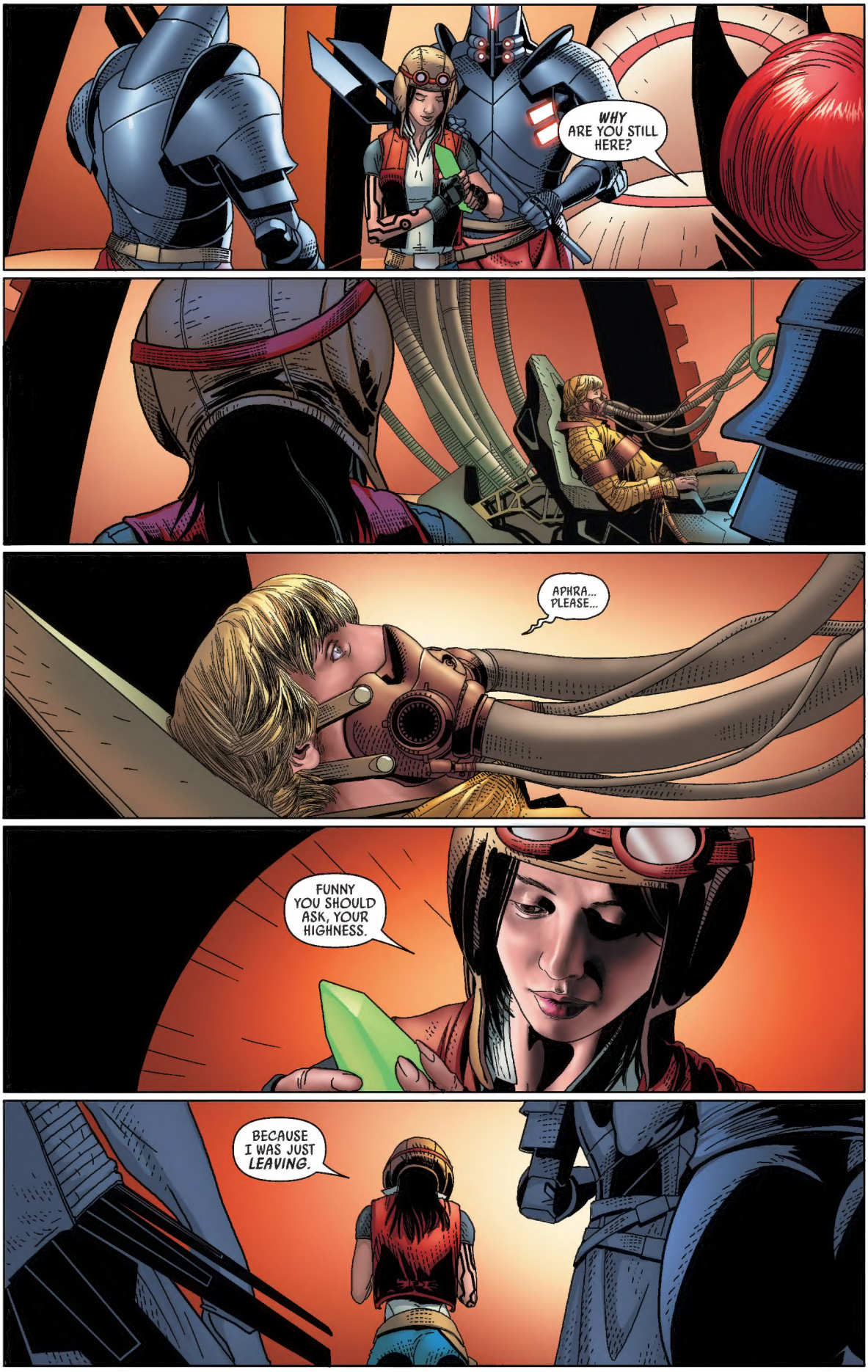
AAAAAAHHH!
RRRRRRRRGGHH!
MOTHER OF MOONS.
I AM REGISTERING A MOST...CURIOUS SENSATION.
VISUAL DISEQUILIBRIUM. ARRHYTHMIC PALPITATIONS IN MY CHEST CAVITY. AN INCREASED FLOW OF LUBRICANTS THROUGHOUT MY EXTREMITIES. TELL ME, HUMANS, IS THIS...
...IS THIS HOW IT FEELS TO BE IN LOVE?

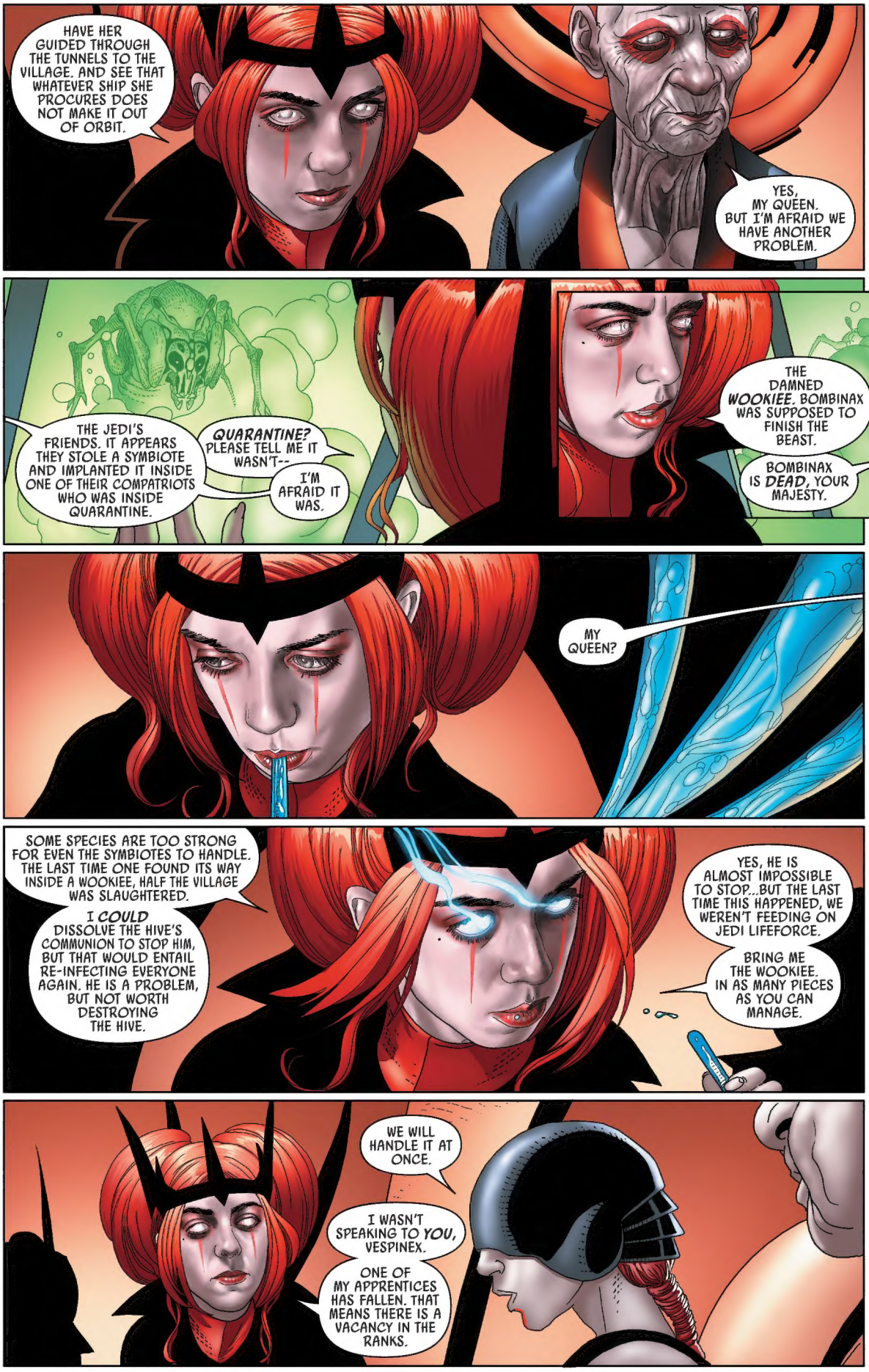
THAT'S NOT EXACTLY THE EMOTION I'M FEELING, TRIPLE-ZERO.
HEY, CREEPIO. HOW DO WE STOP THIS RABID SUPER-WOOKIEE FROM KILLING US?
OH, WE DON'T.
IF THE SYMBIOTE-INFECTED BLACK KRRSANTAN SO CHOOSES, HE COULD MURDER US ALL IN QUITE A SPECTACULAR FASHION.
BLEEP!
WELL NO, OF COURSE NOT YOU, BEETEE. YOU ARE LIKE A DEATH STAR ON WHEELS.
ALL WE CAN HOPE TO DO IS POINT OUR FERAL FRIEND IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION.
OH, GREAT AND BEAUTIFUL WOOKIEE-BEAST! WE FEW FEEBLE FEMALES AND PALTRY DROIDS ARE NOT WORTH THE GORY GLORY OF YOUR LUXURIOUSLY SAVAGE TOUCH!
THE CITADEL! MANY TASTY, FLESHY, SYMBIOTE-ENHANCED MORSELS AWAIT YOU INSIDE THE SCREAMING CITADEL!


GGRRRRGHH!
WHAT HAVE WE JUST UNLEASHED, SANA?
WE HAD NO CHOICE, PRINCESS. WE'RE NOT FIGHTING THE EMPIRE HERE.
THE QUEEN OF KTATH'ATN DOESN'T PLAY BY ANY RULES. IF WE'RE GONNA SAVE HAN AND LUKE...
"...WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO FIGHT MONSTERS WITH MONSTERS."
WRRRRHH!
THAT INCLUDES YOU TWO. LET'S GO, MURDER DROIDS.
BLEEP!
NO, I DON'T LIKE SANA MUCH EITHER, BEETEE, BUT SHE DID JUST CALL US MONSTERS AND MURDER DROIDS, SO PERHAPS SHE'S TRYING TO MAKE FRIENDS.
LUKE AND HAN ARE SOMEWHERE INSIDE THAT CITADEL, PRISONERS OF THE QUEEN, SURROUNDED BY UNIMAGINABLE HORRORS. WE'VE GOT TO FIND THEM AS FAST AS WE CAN.
AND WHAT ABOUT OUR OLD FRIEND DOCTOR APHRA?
WHAT ABOUT HER? IF APRHA'S SHOWN US ANYTHING...

"...IT'S THAT SHE'S PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF TAKING CARE OF HERSELF."
IS THERE ANY FOOD LEFT IN THIS PLACE? ALL THIS RUNNING AND DOUBLE-CROSSING HAS LEFT ME FAMISHED.
I MEAN, I KNOW I BLEW UP YOUR BREAKFAST TABLE AND ALL, BUT YOU WERE TRYING TO PUT A SYMBIOTE ON MY BRAIN TO MAKE ME A MINDLESS ZOMBIE SLAVE.
UH, NO OFFENSE, GUYS.
IT IS DONE.
THIS CONCLUDES OUR AGREEMENT, DOCTOR APHRA.
NOW TAKE YOUR BAUBLE AND GO.
THE RUR CRYSTAL. SAFETY BASAL LEVEL ACTIVATED! I CAN WORK WITH THIS! HOW DID YOU...
THERE ARE MANY DARK SECRETS HIDDEN INSIDE THIS CITADEL, MY DEAR DOCTOR. IF YOU VALUE YOUR FLESH AND YOUR SANITY, I SUGGEST YOU REFRAIN FROM ASKING ANY MORE QUESTIONS.
HOW ABOUT JUST ONE MORE LITTLE ONE?


WHAT HAPPENS TO *HIM?*
ARE YOU GONNA PUT ONE OF THOSE SYMBIOTES INSIDE SKYWALKER?
NO. I HAVE *OTHER* PLANS FOR YOUR YOUNG FRIEND.
YES, YOU DID RUIN MY BREAKFAST THIS MORNING, DOCTOR, BUT YOU ALSO MANAGED TO BRING ME AN EVEN MORE DELECTABLE MEAL.
HMMM. I DO ADORE THE TASTE OF *JEDI.*
NOW ALLOW ME TO ASK *YOU* ONE QUESTION, DOCTOR.


WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?
APHRA... PLEASE...
FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK, YOUR HIGHNESS.
BECAUSE I WAS JUST LEAVING.


HAVE HER GUIDED THROUGH THE TUNNELS TO THE VILLAGE. AND SEE THAT WHATEVER SHIP SHE PROCURES DOES NOT MAKE IT OUT OF ORBIT.
YES, MY QUEEN. BUT I'M AFRAID WE HAVE ANOTHER PROBLEM.
THE JEDI'S FRIENDS. IT APPEARS THEY STOLE A SYMBIOTE AND IMPLANTED IT INSIDE ONE OF THEIR COMPATRIOTS WHO WAS INSIDE QUARANTINE.
QUARANTINE? PLEASE TELL ME IT WASN'T--
I'M AFRAID IT WAS.
THE DAMNED WOOKIEE. BOMBINAX WAS SUPPOSED TO FINISH THE BEAST.
BOMBINAX IS DEAD, YOUR MAJESTY.
MY QUEEN?
SOME SPECIES ARE TOO STRONG FOR EVEN THE SYMBIOTES TO HANDLE. THE LAST TIME ONE FOUND ITS WAY INSIDE A WOOKIEE, HALF THE VILLAGE WAS SLAUGHTERED.
I COULD DISSOLVE THE HIVE'S COMMUNION TO STOP HIM, BUT THAT WOULD ENTAIL RE-INFECTING EVERYONE AGAIN. HE IS A PROBLEM, BUT NOT WORTH DESTROYING THE HIVE.
YES, HE IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP...BUT THE LAST TIME THIS HAPPENED, WE WEREN'T FEEDING ON JEDI LIFEFORCE.
BRING ME THE WOOKIEE. IN AS MANY PIECES AS YOU CAN MANAGE.
WE WILL HANDLE IT AT ONCE.
I WASN'T SPEAKING TO YOU, VESPINEX.
ONE OF MY APPRENTICES HAS FALLEN. THAT MEANS THERE IS A VACANCY IN THE RANKS.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO FILL IT...CAPTAIN SOLO?
WHAT IN THE HELL IS THIS UGLY LITTLE...
GAHH, GET IT OFF!
GET IT...
GAAARRGGGH!
DRINK, SOLO.
AGGGH, NO...=GLUG= GARRGGGH!
DRINK AND BE REBORN.
AH. HNNNGG. AHHHH.
AHHHH. YES...
HOW MAY I SERVE YOU... MY QUEEN?

GRRRRROORRR!
THIS PLACE IS A MAZE. WE'RE NEVER GONNA FIND HAN AND LUKE LIKE THIS.
ONE OF YOU DROIDS, PLUG INTO THE SYSTEM AND FIND OUR FRIENDS.
AH, WE'RE NOT REALLY THAT SORT OF DROID.
THEN JUST FIGURE OUT WHERE THEY'RE AT! AND FAST!
WELL, IF YOU INSIST.
THOUGH I CAN'T GUARANTEE IT WILL BE FAST.
I DO PREFER TO TAKE MY TIME.

AAH! HOW RUDE!
DESTROY THE DROIDS.
BRING THE WOMEN TO ME.
AH. IT APPEARS I FOUND ONE.
HAN?
OH, NO. HE'S BEEN INFECTED.

AND WE'RE BEING OVERWHELMED! RUN!
MURDER DROIDS! WHERE DID THOSE STUPID--
GAGGGH!
HAN! STAY BACK! DON'T MAKE ME--!
YOUR WAR IS AT AN END, PRINCESS.
NO MORE REBELLION. NO MORE EMPIRE.
NO!
NOW THERE IS ONLY THE QUEEN.
BLEEP!
YES, BEETEE, I WAS STARTING TO WONDER THE VERY SAME THING. WHY ARE WE RISKING OUR CIRCUITS FOR THESE REBELS?
AND WHERE IS DOCTOR APHRA? YOU DON'T THINK SHE'D DARE BETRAY US, DO YOU?
BLEEP!
YES, THANK YOU FOR NOTICING, I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON MY SARCASM PROTOCOLS.

"JUST GIVE ME SOMETHING THAT'S *FAST*. QUEEN'S ORDERS."
THE FASTEST SHIP YOU'VE GOT ON THIS BACKWOODS PLANET. JUST DON'T EXPECT TO EVER SEE IT AGAIN.
OR *ME*.
NOT SORRY I'M MISSING WHATEVER'S MAKING ALL THOSE SCREAMS COME FROM THE SCREAMING CITADEL.
NOPE. NOT SORRY AT ALL.
YOU LIE.
I AM RUR AND I SEE THROUGH YOUR VEIL OF LIES.
YOU ARE FILLED WITH REGRET.

YOU JUST WOKE UP AFTER THOUSANDS OF YEARS, RUR. YOU DON'T KNOW ME.
ALSO, YOU'RE A ROCK.
YOU BETRAYED SOMEONE. AND NOW YOU ARE WRACKED WITH GUILT. THIS IS AN UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE FOR YOU.
THE GUILT, I MEAN. NOT THE BETRAYAL.
LUKE SKYWALKER. WHY DO I CARE ABOUT THAT STUPID KID? HE'S DUMB AND NAIVE AND...
...AND EVERYTHING I'M NOT.
YOU'VE FACED TRAGEDY. IT MADE YOU WHAT YOU ARE.
YEAH.
BUT SO DID HIS.
YOU ARE FEELING DEEPLY FRUSTRATED. MOSTLY WITH YOURSELF.
I WENT THROUGH A LOT OF TROUBLE TO ACTIVATE YOU. I SURE HOPE YOU PROVE MORE INSIGHTFUL THAN THIS.
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO NEXT, YOU ARE UNLIKELY TO LEAVE THIS PLANET ALIVE.
I'VE GOT NO FRIENDS LEFT, EXCEPT FOR A TALKING ROCK THAT LIKES TO STATE THE OBVIOUS. I AM ONE DAMN LUCKY DOCTOR.
THIS IS ALSO UNTRUE.

HAN, DON'T...
BE STILL, PRINCESS. THE PROCESS IS ONLY MILDLY EXCRUCIATING.
YEAH, WELL SO'S THIS.
UUGH!
OH, DEAR. WHAT NOW?
BLEEP!
INDEED, BEETEE. FOR A PLACE CALLED "THE SCREAMING CITADEL," THIS CASTLE IS DECIDEDLY SHORT ON FUN.
WHERE THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? WE WERE BETRAYING YOU.
NOT TODAY YOU'RE NOT.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. IS THERE A REASON WE SHOULD WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW?
YES. AND HER NAME IS APHRA.
HELP ME SAVE MY FRIENDS, I HELP YOU KILL YOURS.
DEAL?

MORE PLASMA SPEARS! WE NEED MORE--
BLEEP!
YES, BEETEE. I AM ALSO BEGINNING TO LIKE THIS SANA PERSON. I AGREE THAT WE SHOULD MURDER HER LAST.
HOW DID YOU EVER THINK YOU COULD WIN HERE? YOU ARE BUT A PRINCESS, AND SHE IS A QUEEN. NOW PREPARE TO--
NEVER MUCH CARED FOR QUEENS.
GUHH!
OR SOLOS FOR THAT MATTER.

=COUGH=
LOOK OUT, HE'S TEARING FREE OF--
HHRRRRGH!
FASCINATING. SUCH POWER.
STOP HIM! BUT DAMAGE HIS FLESH, AND YOU WILL KNOW HIS PAIN A THOUSANDFOLD!
GAAGH! YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT PAIN, LADY?
LET'S TALK!
AAAAGGH!
VERY WELL.
THOUGH I DON'T EXPECT YOU WILL ENJOY THE CONVERSATION.

RRGGH! WHERE DID SHE...?
GAAGH!
OOOH. BEST NOT SPILL ANY DROPS.

THAT EXPLOSION WAS TRIGGERED FROM *OUTSIDE*, BUT WE ARE AT THE SUMMIT OF THE TOWER.
WHO IN ALL THE GALAXY WOULD BE *INSANE* ENOUGH TO *SCALE* THE SCREAMING CITADEL?
WHO INDEED.
HEY, SORRY, THINK I LEFT SOMETHING HERE.
ANYBODY SEE A *FARM BOY* LYING AROUND?
YOU. YOU DARE GO BACK ON OUR BARGAIN.
BRING ME A SYMBIOTE.
YEAH. ABOUT THAT.
NO... WHAT DID YOU...
SEE, I FIGURED OUT WHY YOU DIDN'T WANNA PUT ONE INSIDE LUKE.
BECAUSE IN THE SYMBIOTE HIVE MIND, THE STRONGEST BEING SITS AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN, RIGHT?
AAAARRRGGH!
NO.
AND I KNOW YOU'RE PRETTY IMPRESSIVE AND ALL, YOUR HIGHNESS. BUT GUESS WHAT?

THE FORCE IS PRETTY STRONG WITH THIS ONE.
BOW... BEFORE YOUR KING.

DOCTOR APHRA
NEXT ISSUE:

Tour
THE SEVEN SEAS
With
BLACK MANTA
EMPIRE
Call 555-FISH